[as Garrison's Roller Coaster Stopped?

By Gary Ronberg
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THE FALL of 1966 the Warren
't had been out for almost two
The official inquiry into the as-
ıation of President John F. Ken-
had stated in voluminous detail
.ee Harvey Oswald had not only
the President, but had acted
. Officially, at least, there had
no conspiracy to kill the Presi-

ny, however, disputed the find-
of the Warren Commission. Some
labeled the report a federal cover-
the tragic events in Dallas in
mber 1963. In homes and offices,
staurants and bars and at cocktail
es throughout the world, it was
ed that there had been a conspira-
kill Kennedy, and that the key
bers in the plot still were free.

where was the discussion more
d than in New Orleans, in the bis-
and honky tonks along Bourbon
et. Conspicuous by his absence,
ver, was James Garrison, the ci-
district attorney. Garrison, who
ıently toured the area in a white
ıer jacket, buying drinks for the
ılars, was nowhere to be seen.
ıor soon had it that for some mys-
ous reason, the midnight oil was
ning at the D.A.'s office at the in-
ection of Tulane and Broad.

AN ARTICLE in the New Orleans
gazine, one writer suggested that
rison had deserted his old haunts
ause his career was on the rocks,
t he was morose and undecided
ut his future.

So far he (has) had only political
," wrote David Chandler. "But roll-
coasters always come to a halt at the bottom." The only flaw in Chandler's assessment was that it was seven years premature.

Twelve days ago Garrison's roller coaster indeed came to a halt — at the bottom — but not before he had shaken the world with a wild "investigation" into the Kennedy assassination. What he was doing in the fall of 1966 was preparing a probe to prove that the President had been the victim of a conspiracy which included Oswald, an obscure figure named David W. Ferrie and Clay Shaw, a prominent New Orleans businessman. Before Garrison was finished Ferrie was dead, like Oswald, and Shaw — though ultimately acquitted — was all but destroyed.

Amazingly, Garrison didn't get hurt until Dec. 15, when he was defeated in the Democratic primary by Harry Connick. The election was one of the closest in the city's history, and it took the massed strength of the New Orleans financial establishment to unseat the controversial incumbent.

Connick's campaign was finely-tuned and highly-organized, and Connick never denied charges that he was spending about $250,000 on the election. By contrast, Garrison's drive was haphazard and disorganized; he had virtually no staff and conducted most of his campaigning in bars, restaurants and lodge halls, buying drinks for anyone who would listen to his jokes and political promises.

ONE WONDERS why the election was as close at it was. Not only was Garrison humiliated in his tissue-paper prosecution of Shaw, as recently as last summer he was charged with giving and accepting bribes to protect illegal pinball machine gambling. The fact is that in any other city in the South, Garrison would have been a nobody. But in New Orleans, with its large Catholic population, he has been able to capitalize on white longshoremen and truck drivers who were as outraged as blacks over the assassination of Kennedy.

Garrison had already lost the Shaw case in 1970, but still was elected to a third term after asserting that the Federal Government was out to get him. Blacks, who represent about 25 per cent of the city's population, voted for him almost unanimously and he got heavy support from poor white areas. In the eyes of the majority of the electorate, Garrison was a crusader determined to slice through a federal cover-up of the assassination and reveal the "truth."

Garrison got extremely good mileage out of this approach. As he stood trial for the pinball bribes last summer, the Government thought it had an air-tight case, complete with a witness who testified that he had carried money to Garrison and even recorded their conversation on tape. But the district attorney, again charging that he was a target of a conspiratorial government trying to shut him up, won an acquittal.

Under the circumstances, the acquittal of Shaw would have steered most district attorneys to other business at hand. But not the flamboyant Garrison. Shaw had maintained that he did not even know Oswald and Ferrie, and a 12-man jury believed him unanimously. But no sooner was the verdict announced than Garrison was charging Shaw with perjury.

The New Orleans States-Item demanded Garrison's resignation, saying that "He has shown himself unfit to hold the office. He has perverted the law rather than prosecute it." The newspaper said the "persecution" of Shaw was a "perversion of the legal process such has not been often seen."

SHAW, whose personal finances had been depleted by his defense, was spared further agony only when a United States district judge issued a permanent injunction in May of 1971 forbidding Garrison to prosecute Shaw on the perjury charge. Judge Herbert W. Christenberry's 21-page ruling said that Garrison's perjury charge was "brought in bad faith and that such bad faith constitutes irreparable injury, which is great and immediate."

Then Christenberry touched on Garrison's motives for bullying Shaw, saying that Garrison had significant financial interest in the prosecution because of a book he had written on his investigation, titled "Heritage of Stone."

"It is obvious," Christenberry said, "that the sale of Garrison's book may be promoted by the publicity resulting from the continued prosecution of Clay Shaw." Christenberry then criticized what he called Garrison's "quest for publicity in the case," his use of outside finances in the investigation, his tactics of obtaining information and his continuing harassment of Shaw.

Since his primary defeat, Garrison has not been seen and has been unavailable for comment. A spokesman said, however, that the district attorney is not conceding defeat and may even investigate the election, charging that certain districts reported what appeared to be suspicious vote totals.

CONNICK outpolled Garrison by 64,952 votes to 62,731, but assistant district attorney John Volz said that there were differences in the vote totals between the Dec. 15 election and the November primary, in which Connick forced Garrison into the runoff.

"In one precinct where in the first primary we got 375 votes, in this past primary we got 65 and Connick doubled what he had in the first primary," Volz said. "I'm not saying that because we lost that precinct is abnormal, but the volume of the vote turnaround is questionable."

Volz said that any investigation of the election would not be under the auspices of the district attorney's office, but conducted instead by Garrison's campaign officers.

Now the hot question in the bars and restaurants along Bourbon Street is, once again, "Where's Jim Garrison?" No one knows if the midnight oil is burning at Tulane and Broad, and no one can be sure if the D.A.'s roller coaster is permanently stopped—or merely stalled—at the bottom. In any event, the next move is up to Jim Garrison.

JAMES GARRISON who recently lost a campaign for re-election as district attorney of New Orleans. (AP Photo)